



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel GCE Drama & Theatre (9DR0)
9DR0 / 03: Theatre Makers in Practice

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9 DR0/03 Theatre Makers In Practice

Written Examination (Externally Assessed)

Introduction

This is the sixth year of examination for this Component (9DR0/03) Component 3: Theatre Makers in Practice. This year, 2023, saw a welcome return to teaching and examining the full specification.

The component takes the form of a two and a half hour written examination and requires candidates to consider, analyse and evaluate how different **theatre makers create impact**. Throughout the component, candidates will have studied how production ideas and dramatic elements are communicated to an audience from the **perspective of a director, a performer and a designer** as well as an informed member of an audience themselves. There are three areas to be covered:

Section A: Live Theatre Evaluation
(20 Marks)

Section B: Page to Stage: realisation of a complete performance text
(18 marks + 18 marks = 36 marks)

Section C: Interpreting one complete performance text, in light of one practitioner for a contemporary audience
(24 marks).

Section A: Live Theatre Evaluation

Section A gives candidates a choice of questions which are designed to give opportunities to discuss performance elements as well as design elements. At the heart of the question is a statement that invites a personal response from the candidate, whilst analysing what they have seen or heard, and then going on to evaluate it. It was very pleasing to see that questions 1 and 2 were answered in almost equal measure, so it not possible to say that one question was more popular than another. For this series, candidates were expected to see a **live theatre production**. In the unlikely event of this not being possible, centres had to request permission from Drama Assessment at Pearson to see a digital performance as the live theatre demand is an Ofqual requirement. It was therefore extremely disappointing to read of so many digital performances which is a different medium to being in the same room (theatre) as the performers. It was even more disappointing to read that some candidates stated that they had seen the digital performance they were writing about, many times, which means that we are not comparing like with like and this is something that we will look at more closely in future series. The results from the Pearson survey indicate that centres do want to keep a live theatre evaluation with the accompanying 500 words of notes.

Unfortunately, there continued to be an increase in candidates writing about musicals or dance shows that contained no dialogue and so were unable to meet the required demands of this Drama and Theatre specification which is quite clear that sung-through productions or productions without the spoken word are not allowed. Similarly, a number of candidates wrote about performance texts from Section B or Section C which are forbidden texts and had to be awarded zero marks. This was emphasised in last year's report as well as through Drama newsletters and training events.

Popular productions for both questions included: *Small Island*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, *Things I Know to be True*, *Lovesong*, *The Crucible*, *Frankenstein*, *Life of Pi*, *Drive your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, and *Othello*. Although less than in previous years, *The Woman in Black* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* also made regular appearances, as did new work like *Romeo and Julie* and *The Doctor*. There were examples of candidates supporting what appeared to be their local theatre and this was refreshing to see.

Question 1

Past and present:

Candidates interpreted 'past and present' from a range of perspectives, and these were usually successful. Most agreed with the statement, while a small number deliberately offered a counter-argument. Some candidates focused on how older texts might be updated for a contemporary audience (e.g., Frantic Assembly's *Othello* and the Donmar production of *Julius Caesar*) while others explored how contemporary audiences have higher demands in terms of technical elements such as projections and sound scaping (*Ocean at the End of the Lane/Things I Know To Be True*).

Some responses focused on practical elements such as costume and set (*Small Island*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*) as a means of communicating the past or present and others explored how themes such as feminism/HIV Aids/racism/gender were presented as a means of looking at universal human experiences – universal themes were seen as either sat outside of the notion of past/present or could help the audience understand how the past and present were linked.

These 'universal themes' responses tended to focus more on the work of performers as a means of communicating ideas from the past and how to make them relevant in terms of the issues of the present and were successful in this approach – in Frantic Assembly's *Othello*, for example and in *Romeo and Julie*.

Successful responses drew on key moments/examples to back up the point and utilised a personalised response within a wider context to explore ideas of communication and impact on audiences. There appeared to be fewer responses that stated that 'the whole audience felt....' There were quite a few productions that elicited personal reactions and candidates indicated how the themes/ideas/characters connected to them on a personal level – TIKTBT, for example.

Question 2

Balance between performer and designers

Examiners felt that candidates responded slightly better to Q2 than Q1. Candidates were strong in articulating an understanding of the importance of collaboration and balance in most of the responses, presenting well-structured and well considered work that was clearly either assured or sophisticated. A very few less successful responses had clearly struggled to connect with the production seen and so wrote from too personalised a perspective to get above the general level – often these had the sense of the ‘prepared answer’ and struggled to connect to the chosen statement, even in relation to a production of *Life of Pi*, for example. Candidates often reported the experience, rather than reflecting on it as an informed member of the audience.

Stronger responses kept the discussion in balance so that design elements and performer techniques were discussed alongside each other, with specific examples from the production seen. More successful responses then explored how this had impact on the audience and what was being communicated, giving opportunities for analysis and evaluation. Responses in the sophisticated and assured levels clearly understood that any theatrical production requires the whole team of performers along with designers (and technicians) to work in harmony to create the director’s vision of the play and were able to communicate this. This question gave the candidates the permission to write with enthusiasm about the production seen and examiners noted that the effect of seeing a digital production somewhat marred this sense of joy compared to the live experience.

Observations/Tips for Success:

- The best answers focussed on detailed moments from the play; constantly referred back to the essence of the question; and demonstrated engagement and excitement.
- Candidates don’t need to ‘tell us the story’- it is the *how* and the *why* not the *what*; they should avoid complaining about the price of theatre tickets, the unreliability of public transport, the successful tour and the disadvantages of being stuck in the ‘gods’.
- The best responses bring the performance to life whilst addressing the statement – in such a manner that if I have seen it too, I’m thinking – “that’s an excellent observation – I had not thought of it that way” or if I haven’t seen it- I’m thinking – “I wish I had seen this!”
- The choice of the performance seen can make all the difference.
- A well-chosen, relevant quote from the one of the performance’s theatre-makers, a succinct point about pre-visit research and expectations met/changed, putting the performance within a context of wider cultural events and current affairs – **these suggest an informed and prepared member of the audience**
- Some examiners noticed better quality responses from candidates who had ‘viewed’ earlier than April-May 2023 and had time to prepare.

In order to gain higher marks candidates needed to give clear examples from the performance seen, whilst analysing and evaluating these key moments. The statement needed to be referred to throughout and connected to the key moments. There needed to be a personal response throughout.

Section B: Page to Stage: Realising a Performance text.

Candidates must practically explore a performance text to consider how theatrical ideas might be realised in performance and communicated to an audience. They must write about one of the texts below:

Accidental Death Of An Anarchist
Colder Than Here
Equus
Fences
Machinal
That Face

The texts cannot be taken into the examination room. Candidates are given an unseen extract which they should then place at the heart of their response. This section of the examination gives no choice of question: candidates have to respond as both a performer and as a designer.

In previous series, Q3 has been the stronger response of the two but this year, there appeared to be little difference which was borne out by examiners' observations and by statistical data.

Fences is still the least popular text, although there were a good number of high scoring responses to this text. *Equus* and *Machinal* appear to be the most popular with *Accidental Death*, *That Face* and *Colder Than Here* having a similar take up.

A clear working knowledge of the performance text is essential to success and many candidates had an impressive idea of exactly how they would stage their chosen performance text and had well-crafted responses to being both a performer and a designer. The weakest aspect in Section B was candidates not referring to the rest of the performance text, they nearly all made good use of the extract but for many, that was as far as the response got.

Question 3

Use of stage space

Question 3 clearly states that they are in the role of a performer ('As a performer...') and while many candidates wrote in the first person there were still a lot who blurred the boundaries of a performer with that of a Director stating how they might move the character rather than being the character. Use of stage space was interpreted in different

ways, all valid, ranging from proxemics, movement, body language and physicality. Examiners did feel there was a tendency to *over move* the chosen role whereas some were more confident to argue for stillness within the extract if appropriate.

Higher scoring candidates readily connected the extract to the rest of the performance text and were clear about how they would use stage space to support their portrayal of a character.

Question 4

Use of Sound or Lighting

Lighting was more popular than Sound but not overwhelmingly so. There was an impressive use of technical and subject specific language used across all texts. A small number of candidates referenced more than **one** theatrical element so could only be awarded marks for the element that featured most prominently. Responses for Sound often drew on ideas of genre to inform their decisions made as a designer and then outlined with some depth how this would be realised to communicate meaning and create impact. Genre also informed lighting responses for *Machinal*, *That Face* and *Equus* with a good degree of success as the candidates embedded extract/whole play and genre influences within their designs (with some genre referred to for *Fences* and *Colder Than Here* also sometimes used successfully). *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* lighting candidates seemed to focus on location and time. There seems to be an increasing level of confidence in outlining which lantern, colour or projections will be used with a discussion of why in terms of communication and impact. Technical language was less well developed for responses that focussed on Sound.

Observations/Tips for Success

- Avoid lengthy context about the writer's life or the play's 'story'- the examiner knows these
- As examiners we need to know that your ideas fit the WHOLE PLAY. Too many candidates treated the extract in isolation, especially with the design aspects
- It is so important to refer to other moments from the rest of the play, this is embodied in the Mark Scheme and allows the candidate to show further knowledge and understanding
- Be clear about your role: As a Performer I will... or As a Designer I will use ...
- There is no need to reference practitioners in section B, remain focussed on the specific task.

Section C : Theatre Makers in Practice : Interpreting a Performance Text

Candidates must practically explore a complete performance text in the light of a chosen practitioner in order to outline and justify their ideas for a production concept. They must write about one of the texts below:

Antigone
Doctor Faustus *
Hedda Gabler
Lysistrata *
The Maids
The School for Scandal
The Tempest
Waiting for Godot
Woyzeck *

* These are carry-over texts from the legacy qualification and are available as a free download from the Edexcel website. It is recommended that students use these editions.

The practitioner must come from one of the list below:

Artaud
Brecht
Berkoff
Complicite
Kneehigh
Joan Littlewood
Punchdrunk
Stanislavski

Candidates take in to the examination room a clean copy of their chosen text. They have to complete **either** Q5 **or** Q6. There was an almost equal divide between the 2 questions which was very pleasing as this shows that the paper is functioning well and affords candidates a real choice. The most popular texts seemed to be *Woyzeck*, *Lysistrata*, *Antigone* and *Hedda Gabler*. The least popular were *The Maids*, *The Tempest*, *The School for Scandal* and *Waiting For Godot* with *Dr. Faustus* falling somewhere in the middle. Many examiners didn't see any items at all from the least popular texts.

The take up of practitioners is more varied with Joan Littlewood seen the least. Some candidates use a key name to represent their choice of practitioner e.g. they might refer to Simon McBurney if they are using *Complicite* and this is taken in good faith. Sadly, *Kneehigh* as such don't exist any more and it was noticeable how a number of candidates referred to Emma Rice rather than the company. Again, these were all acceptable alternatives.

A detailed knowledge of the chosen practitioner, not just quoted theory but ideally experienced as a student-theatre-maker in practice, and an informed member of an audience of their work was most effective. Brecht was probably the most popular practitioner, but he was not always successfully written about. Instead of vague statements like 'I would use placards', the candidate should be able to reference how and why the practitioner 'used placards' - citing the work. Very few candidates did this; it was

best seen in the candidates using Complicité, many of whom pinpointed a technique through a particular production and how it was effectively used and hence, influenced them and how they are using it. Berkoff and Punchdrunk could also have this precision, but Brecht and Artaud often did not- much of what is claimed to be their methodologies were vague, sometimes daft and sometimes inaccurate.

It cannot be emphasised enough that the pairing between the choice of play text and practitioner is crucial. Some sit comfortably together and actually make things logical and easier for the candidate e.g. Woyzeck and Brecht, Doctor Faustus and Artaud. Hedda Gabler is almost always used with Stanislavski and responses are improving in terms of linking methods to performance and avoiding the rehearsal trap, where some marks can be lost because of heavy reliance on rehearsal techniques.

The original performance conditions (OPC) must be meaningfully referenced. This is not a bolt-on, a potted history, nor does it require obscure research, but it does need to be used relevantly within the response, possibly as a compare and contrast mechanism or even as a key influence to the concept. Sophisticated responses acknowledge the OPC and reference it at pertinent moments throughout the response.

The concept belongs to the candidate and should have been thought out and practiced in minute detail during the course of study. A successful concept is one that accepts the core content of the text chosen and believes in it as a valid text (i.e., genre, character, theme, narrative). Successful concepts have faith in the audience being able to listen and think and do not need outlandish ideas to hook them into well respected and successful texts which have stood the test of time. A successful concept is informed by the OPC and uses it as a means of reflecting upon what contemporary audiences might respond to. Unfortunately, there were many reports of ridiculous concepts that made little or no reference to the OPC of the chosen text and lacked the necessary respect as a theatre maker.

In some cases, the concept was so far removed from the original text that the candidate had to keep explaining it, by default acknowledging that without the explanation the examiner would have no idea what the text was. An idea of concepts that really **didn't work** are:

Woyzeck is an ant, the Drum Major a lion

Faustus set in the wild west where he is a cowboy and Mephistopheles a travelling magician

Antigone and Ismene are Junior Doctors while Creon is a Chief Surgeon

The Tempest in Covid lockdown where Caliban is delivering groceries

The Tempest set in a trampoline Park

The Maids as two sex-trafficked refugees

Lysistrata set at the Oxford v Cambridge boat race

Lysistrata set in UEFA cup finals

There were others where the concept really proved problematic but there was also much to celebrate with carefully considered concepts, many of which had been tried in practical workshops, accurately reflecting the action in the play, and respecting the playwright's intentions.

Question 5

...to effectively highlight characterisation

There were some well thought out production concepts, the most popular combinations seen were setting *Antigone/Lysistrata* in the current Ukraine War or WW2. Covid pandemic and current cost of living crisis was also quite a popular theme. The most successful responses showed a real in-depth knowledge of their practitioner and terminology and utilised a wide range of performance/production elements to develop characterisation, whilst linking back to the whole text and audience impact.

Candidates did well when they provided balanced responses and where the relationship between the practitioner and the extract was evident. Using quotes rooted the responses in the extract effectively particularly when attributed to a character they were highlighting.

Responses that addressed *Antigone* in the style of Brecht were at times very detailed with good references to OPC combined with Brechtian vision. This was again true with Brecht and *Woyzeck* where the candidates effectively linked the ideals of Brecht with the Expressionist movement and overall time period in which theatre was developing.

Leaving enough time to answer the question was important- very often promising responses were limited because they ran out of time.

However, the majority of candidates referenced a named theatrical practitioner and utilised key principles to communicate how the extract would be staged, they didn't always focus on how they would effectively highlight characterisation.

Question 6

..to effectively combine design elements

Examiners felt that this question was better answered than Q5. Punchdrunk, Artaud and Brecht were very popular practitioners for this question. These practitioners and their methodology enabled candidates to be very creative with their production concepts.

The most successful candidates identified key moments and gave in depth explanations of how they would use well thought out and creative design elements while linking back to the performance, characters and practitioner, also taking into account the OPC and how this has influenced/impacted their choices. These candidates used a wide range of design elements and had in depth knowledge of them and their terminology.

A lot of candidates had superficial knowledge of design (especially in lighting/sound) and were not able to talk about it in depth.

Strong responses moved through the extract and considered it in relation to the whole play. Design elements were linked, moving logically from set to costume for example, and using examples to demonstrate how the concept would be highlighted through the elements. Obviously, a focus on the question and the extract was essential for a successful answer. Working systematically through the extract and weaving practical examples throughout the answer was usually successful.

High level responses combined design aspects and, in each paragraph, talked about design coming together to develop something highly effectively on stage with layered technology.

The stronger responses demonstrated how design would inform, complement, and add additional layers of meaning when seen alongside what actors would be doing on stage. These allowed for a coherent and wholly theatrical approach.

The weakest aspect in Section C was candidates not referring to the rest of the performance text and/or having a concept that was unworkable, they nearly all made good use of the extract but for many, that was as far as the response got

One area of concern is that examiners are noticing that a number of scripts are exceptionally similar; this was very clear this year when several new examiners suspected malpractice and asked for responses to be reviewed. It is not malpractice, but centres providing their students with concepts, ideas and phrases that candidates learn and commit to memory. This is not in the spirit of an examination as responses learnt by rote don't always help a candidate but they can cover bases that are likely to be required and it is a great pity to see this type of 'learnt' response.

In conclusion, candidates and their teachers are working hard to access, study and hopefully enjoy all the challenges that this specification offers.

Pearson continue to provide and add to resources available on the website as well as offering training and other support mechanisms all listed below.

Subject specific content and teaching queries including *Ask the Expert* queries:
teachingperformingarts@pearson.com

Assessment administration including request for permission for non-assessed candidates, digital theatre, extension requests :
drama.assessment@pearson.com

General centre related queries including reporting lost coursework, requesting special requirements, queries regarding entries and results:
[Pearson Qualifications Support - Contact Us](#)

Centres are also advised that the FAQ page is updated regularly and designed to answer questions regarding the delivery of the specification. It is important centres look at support materials, as this will help them gauge the expected standard and requirements of this component.

The web address is:

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-a-levels/drama-and-theatre2016.html>

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